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SOVIET POLICY IN KOREA

Soviet interest in the Korean peninsula stems from:

- its geographic proximity to China, Japan, and the Soviet Union;
- and historical circumstances that have made North Korea an arena for Soviet-Chinese rivalry.

Moscow's efforts to strengthen its influence in North Korea at China's expense have not been particularly successful, however, because:

- the Chinese have been active themselves;
- Pyongyang has been able to use Sino-Soviet rivalry to maintain a high degree of independence.

To compete with Peking, Moscow continues to give military aid to North Korea and political support in the UN and elsewhere.

- on the military side, aid has included high-performance aircraft, tanks, guided missile boats, and short-range tactical missiles.
- politically, Moscow renders pro forma support to Pyongyang on the issue of Korean unification, although the Soviets have privately made it clear that they are not sympathetic to some of Pyongyang's behavior and rhetoric. The Soviets have been anxious that the Korean question in the UN not seriously complicate their relationship with the US.

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Moscow's equities in North Korea have limited its policy in South Korea. For a brief period in 1973 the Soviet Union seemed receptive to informal contacts with Seoul, but ceased in the face of Pyongyang's disapproval. Since that time the Soviet Union has sought to walk a careful line, trying to show flexibility on the Korean question without arousing North Korean suspicions. The results have not been impressive.

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